

Research Report

The participation in lifelong learning in Romania

Study prepared by the **Centre for the Study of Democracy**
for **Concordia Employers' Confederation**

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Research Report

Introduction

This report provides an overview of lifelong learning in Romania, based on data from a national survey on a representative sample and interviews with employers and employees. The analysis focuses on exploring the rate of participation in lifelong learning programmes, but also the factors that facilitate and inhibit, respectively, a more sustained participation in such programmes.

The report also includes a series of recommendations that we believe can be taken into account in the context of formulating a new strategy related to lifelong learning in Romania.

The data collected represent the perceptions and evaluations of employers and employees in a variety of occupational fields regarding their experience with vocational training and education programmes, both from the perspective of those who offer these programmes and those who follow them. Beyond these perceptions, the attached report on the institutions and legislation governing lifelong learning is useful in creating a comprehensive picture.

The structure of the report is tripartite. In the first section, we provide an analysis of the survey data collected in the context of this project. Part two comprises a detailed analysis of the

interviews with employers and employees, where we explore in depth some of the aspects of the participation in vocational training programmes identified through the survey. This section places a greater emphasis on those in the HORECA and trade sectors. The final section includes the main conclusions of the study, as well as a series of recommendations for increasing the participation in lifelong learning programmes in Romania.





Official statistical data

02 Lifelong learning in Romania as per the official statistical data and the survey data

The analysis of quantitative data starts with a brief contextualisation of the situation of the participation in lifelong learning programmes in Romania, compared to other EU states.

Thus, Eurostat data indicate a close link between the two usual indicators for lifelong learning: the percentage of those who participated in training in the last four weeks, respectively the percentage of those who participated in the last 12 months (Figure 1). It is worth noting Romania's modest position for both indicators, but especially for the participation in the last 12 months. According to the general trend (represented by the regression line), Romania would be expected to have a participation in the last 12 months of 30% corresponding to the participation in the last month. A possible explanation for the under-trend placement would be a duration of the training programmes above the average of other European

countries, which would decrease the enthusiasm of participating in such programmes. In the absence of other data, it is unclear whether this explanation is plausible. Another explanation relates to possible measurement errors in the case of Romania. The fact that our survey data (survey on a nationally representative sample) has an estimate close to 30% for participation in the last 12 months in Romania lends credibility to this explanation.



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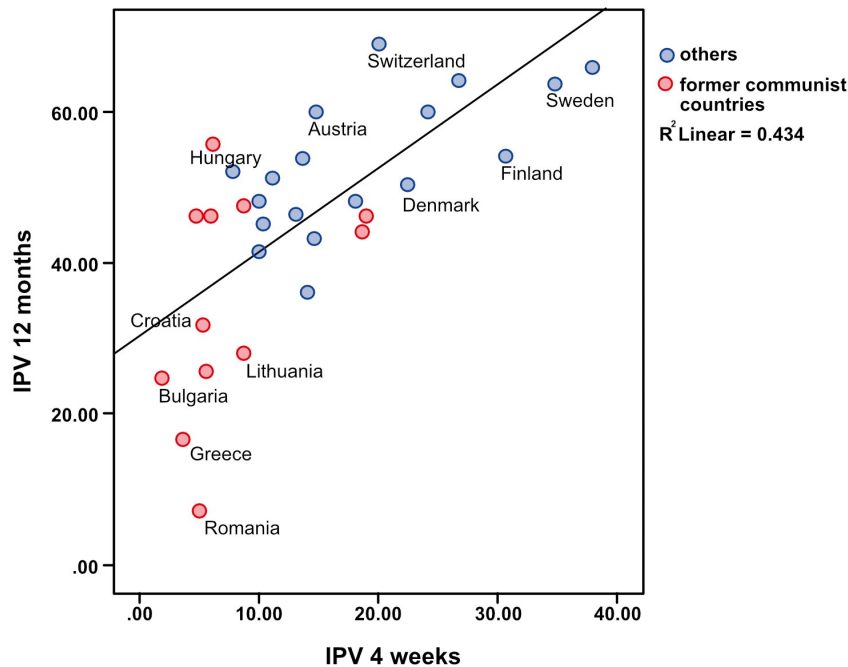


Figure 1. Lifelong learning for the last four weeks vs lifelong learning for the last 12 months for former communist countries and other European countries.

Source: Eurostat 2021, TRNG_LFSE_01 last update: 27/04/2023

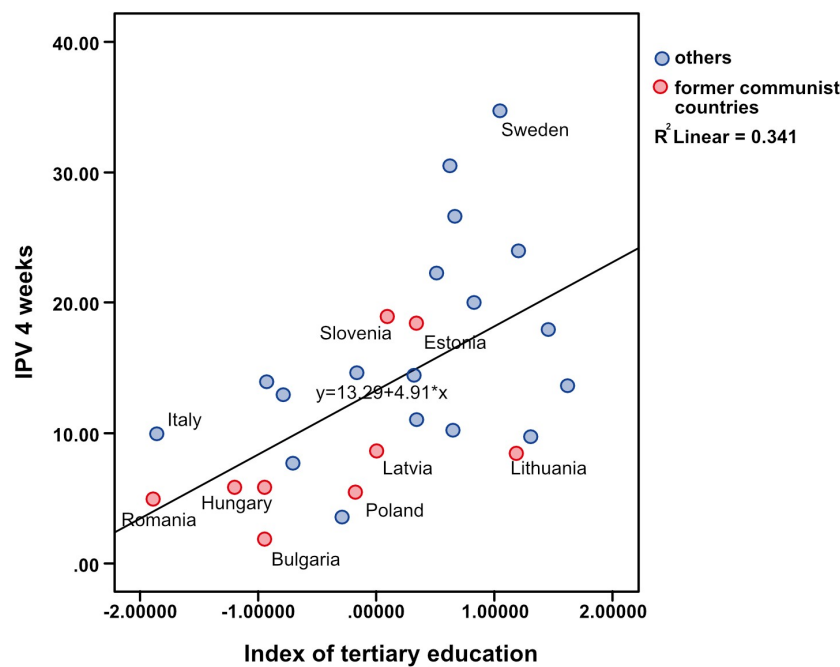


Figure 2. Lifelong learning for the last four weeks vs index of tertiary education for former communist countries and other European countries.

The wide variation in lifelong learning among European countries can be explained to a large extent, about one third, by the proportion of those with tertiary education. Thus, countries with high shares of university graduates tend to have high shares of adults attending training and skilling sessions (Figure 2). Romania follows the trend illustrated in Figure 2: the value of lifelong learning at four weeks is approximately equal to the value predicted by the regression line.



Regression models that include several explanatory variables (tertiary education index, ex-communist past, GDP/capita) lead to the same result in the case of lifelong learning at four weeks: Romania is part of the general trend.

In the context in which the models explain lifelong learning at 12 weeks, Romania remains an atypical case, having a value approximately 25% below the one predicted by the model.

It is recommended that further studies with larger samples and more information on lifelong learning clarify the role of measurement errors and explanatory factors





2.1. Lifelong learning in Romania according to a national survey

The statistical analyses in this section were carried out on a representative sample of adults in Romania from which pensioners, pupils and students were excluded. The data were collected by the CATI method (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews) by Mercury Research, as part of an Omnibus-type survey. The sample has 1000 respondents, which provides a maximum margin of error of 3.1% for a 95% confidence level¹.

How often have you attended vocational training courses in the last 12 months and what was their average duration?

Survey data indicate higher shares of participants than those contained in official statistical data (e.g. Eurostat). Thus, among the respondents under 65 who are not pupils or students, 28.5% state that they have participated in the last 12 months in vocational training courses at the workplace, and 21.5% in training courses organised in their spare time. In total, 38% of respondents say they have attended vocational training at work or in their spare time in the last 12 months. Table 1 presents the relationship between the two types of training.



¹ Questions that were asked of a subsample have a higher margin of error than 3.1%. Thus, some of the questions were addressed only to respondents who are not pupils or students, and who did not exceed 65 years of age. For the answers to these questions the maximum error is 3.8%.



Table 1. Relationship between the participation in vocational training courses organised at workplace, during working hours, and the participation in vocational training courses organised in spare time in the last 12 months. Values represent shares in total eligible participants.

		In the last 12 months, have you attended vocational training courses organised in your spare time?		Total
		Yes	No	
In the last 12 months, have you participated in on-the-job training during the working hours?	Yes	11.5%	17.0%	28.5%
	No	10.0%	61.6%	71.5%
Total		21.4%	78.6%	100.0%

According to the table,

12%

participated in both types of vocational training

Furthermore, the data in the table also show that the on-the-job participation increases the likelihood of the participation in spare time more than fourfold, and vice versa. Thus, it is possible that participation in a lifelong learning programme will attract the desire to participate in other programmes as well. In fact, this idea was also found in interviews with employers: the reluctance to participate decreases after participating in such programmes. Often, the experience of participation becomes a predictor of future participation.



According to the survey, the training at the workplace was free in 81% of cases. Of the courses organised during spare time, 59% are free. The survey data are in agreement with the information obtained from the interviews, according to which, in most cases, the training offered at the workplace is provided free of charge by the employer.

Duration of the vocational training courses

According to the respondents, most often the courses tend to last one or several days (Figure 3, 4). Only 16% of respondents state that they have participated in vocational training at their workplace or in their spare time **lasting more than a week** in the last 12 months.

Workplace courses tend to be shorter than spare-time courses:

a third of workplace courses are longer than a week, compared to 51% of spare-time courses. This discrepancy can be related to several explanations. On the one hand, courses that are offered mostly during spare time can be spaced over a longer period but with a lower number of hours per day or per week. On the other hand, as some of the interviewees suggested, often companies cannot afford to offer longer courses for employees, as this option would lead to a decrease in productivity.

Figure 3. Duration of vocational training courses at the workplace



Figure 4. Duration of vocational training courses in spare time.





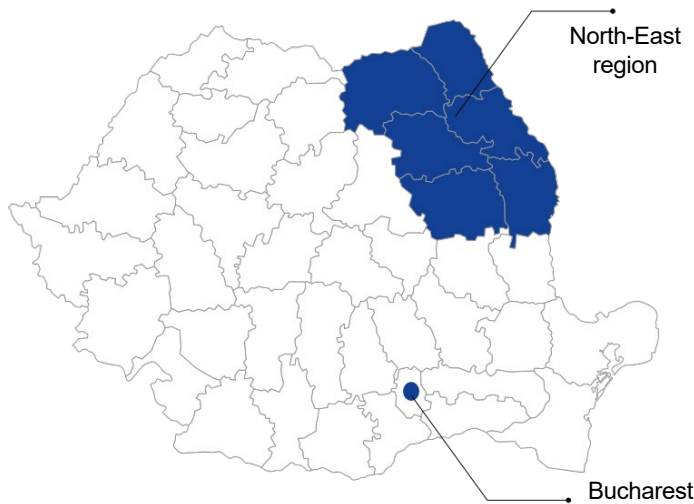
Who has participated in lifelong learning programmes?

As regards workplace programmes, certain categories of respondents are associated with more sustained participation (above the sample average).

Thus, men participate more than women (the difference is small, within the margin of error), and people in the 25-55 age range participate more than those over 55. The category that participates the least is that of the persons in the 18-24 age range, probably due to the fact that they are either students or do not have a stable job at the moment. As expected, participation is higher in urban areas, but even in this situation, increased participation is found in larger cities (over 50,000 inhabitants). From the perspective of geographical areas, higher participation rates are observed in Bucharest, in the Central and North-West areas. The data also show that people working in the state sector participate in lifelong learning programmes more than those working in the private sector. An interesting result is related to the fact that people who have management positions (more than 6 subordinates) participate more than the others. This result is also consistent with the information

obtained from the interviews, which showed that most vocational training and skilling courses are aimed at those whose workplace positions involve managerial tasks as well. Areas of increased participation in lifelong learning programmes are IT, public administration and health. From a socio-economic point of view, the participation is higher among respondents with higher education (more than high school - post-secondary school, bachelor's degree, master's degree), and those with an above-average income. Participating in lifelong learning programmes that take place during spare time is similar to the above, but with some notable differences. Thus, higher education, above-average income, urban residence, and gender are associated with higher participation in the same ways as in the previous example. But the age group most often associated with higher participation is 35-44, followed by 18-24 (only for participation in spare-time programmes).





The highest participation rates are observed in Bucharest, followed by smaller cities (under 50,000 inhabitants), and, as to geographical areas, Bucharest (which ranks first) is followed by the North-East region.

Again, as regards spare-time courses, people working in the state sector participate more than those who are active in the private sector, but unlike the previous example, people in managerial positions involving fewer than 6 subordinates are more active.

The fields in which participation is higher are education and HoReCa. The data show gender differences of about 3.5% in favour of men as regards the participation in lifelong learning (LLL), but the difference is within the margin of statistical error. The courses taken by men were more frequently longer than one day than for women (4% difference).

At the same time, men who have undertaken LLL are more likely than women to have positive perceptions of their training: 27% of men say they found a new job, compared to 18% of women, while 41% of men say that they had a pay rise due to training, compared to only 29% of women.





One of the notable gender differences concerns the reasons why respondents did not participate in lifelong learning programmes. So, the share of women mentioning high costs is double than that of men (38% versus 19%). Also, the share of those who say they would take a training course if it were free of charge is higher with women than with men (71% as compared to 62%).

Taken together, these results suggest the existence of unequal gender conditions in the labour market, possibly within the family as well. It seems to be more difficult for women to obtain financial resources for professional specialisations, and the labour market

rewards such specialisations less for women than for men. An alternative explanation is that the share of women is higher than that of men in occupations for which LLL has a relatively small effect. Thus, in education and teaching the gender ratio is more than 3:1 in favour of women, while the share of respondents in these areas who say that LLL leads to higher pay or better jobs is about half the average for the whole sample.





To what extent does the socio-economic context of the county matter for the participation in lifelong learning courses?

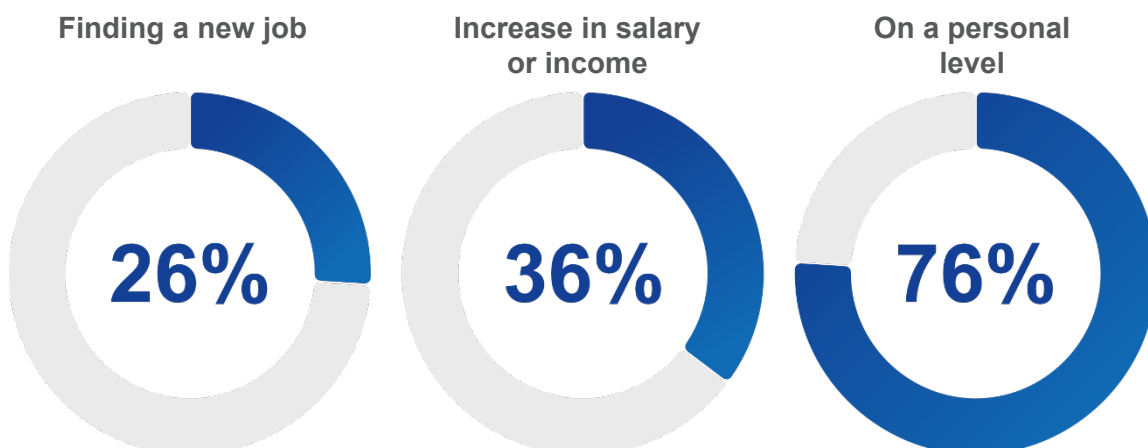
The analysis included a series of socio-economic development indicators at the county level, such as the urbanisation rate, infant mortality, life expectancy at birth, average income, GDP/capita, and the percentage of those who passed the baccalaureate. None of these indicators has a statistically significant effect independent of the respondents' level of education and income. Developed counties tend to have higher shares of people attending skilling/training courses, but the effect of development is fully transmitted through the subjects' individual level of education and income. In other words, a person from a developed county has similar chances to

a person with the same level of education and income from a less developed county to participate in lifelong learning courses.

Perceptions of the attended courses

Respondents who participated in a vocational training course in the last 12 months were asked whether they used it to find a job, to increase their income or on a personal level. The responses are presented in Figure 5. Moreover, the data show that 84% of respondents indicated at least one positive response: 45% one positive response, 24% two responses, 15% three responses. Thus, even within a 12-month time frame, vocational training courses are perceived as having positive effects for most learners.

Figure 5. What was learned in the most recent course helped the respondent :



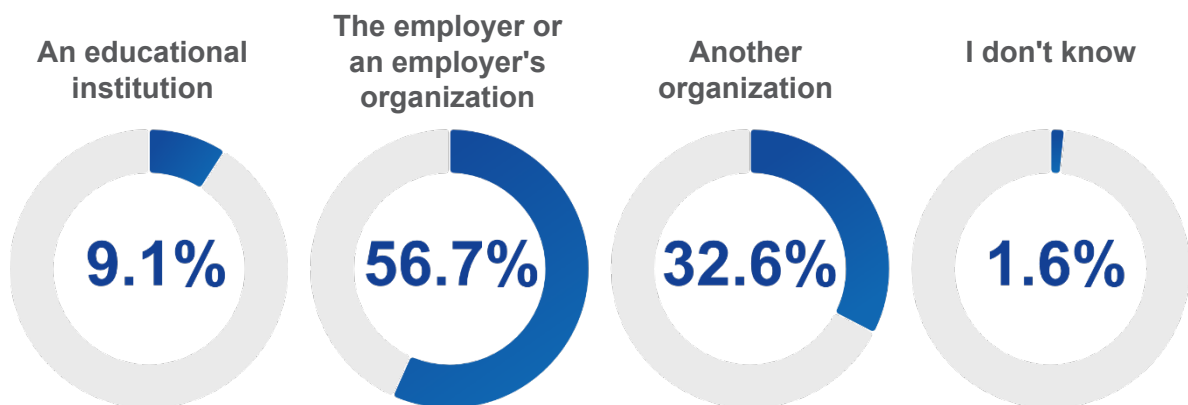


Respondents were asked which category of organisation the organiser of the most recent course belonged to. In over half of the cases, the organiser was the employer or an employer organisation, in 9% it was an educational institution, and in 33% it was another organisation

(Figure 6).

This result indicates the extremely limited role currently played by educational institutions in providing lifelong learning.

Figure 6. Organiser of the most recent course attended by the respondent



The type of organisation having arranged the training courses is not correlated with the answers regarding the usefulness of courses.





Reasons why respondents have not attended courses in the last 12 months

We asked the respondents who did not participate in lifelong learning courses what were the reasons for not participating, and the reasons are as follows (in order of the shares of respondents who indicated them): the lack of time (62%), they did not feel the need (39%), other reasons (34%), the cost of courses (28%), the poor offer of courses (24%). We also asked those who have not participated in lifelong learning programmes what would convince them

to participate, and the answers are as follows: it should be free (68%), it should offer a diploma or certificate (68%), it should be of help at their workplace (64%), it should help them find a better job (60%), it should be during working hours (39%). The difference between the relatively small number of respondents who did not participate because they are expensive and the percentage of those who would like these courses to be free suggests that cost is not the only potential barrier to participating in training courses, but it is one of the most relevant.

2.2. Lifelong training, post-secondary education and micro-certificates

Employers have a direct interest in the workforce having the competencies and skills needed for current and future jobs, but the labour market cannot be fully responsible for levers to increase the quality and relevance of lifelong learning.

Employers face the so-called dilemmas of cooperation, in the context of labour shortage: thus, an employee whose qualification increases following a course becomes attractive to other companies as well; at the same time, organising employee training is often more effective on a larger scale than that of a single company. Amid labour shortages, training an employee becomes a potential stake for the employer in a dynamic labour market: the employer wants a trained employee, but not so trained that he leaves for another company.

In addition, companies tend to focus on present needs, largely ignoring future projections. In fact, some companies cannot afford to consider these projections for financial reasons (especially smaller companies). In other words, what benefits the employer, from a training perspective, is not necessarily beneficial to or formulated in the interest of the employee. For these reasons, the task of the state is to create mechanisms to stimulate lifelong learning that transcend its relevance for today's labour market and to contribute to the creation of a sustainable society that values



knowledge, democratic values and inclusion. Lifelong learning overlaps significantly with post-secondary education (PSE) and micro-certificates. Therefore, measures to develop PSE and micro-certificates have effects on lifelong learning as well.

Post-secondary education and lifelong learning

In 2020, only 25% of Romania's population had tertiary education as compared to 40% at European level. Romania's average is lower than that of Bulgaria and Serbia. A strong post-secondary/post-high school (non-tertiary, non-university) education (PSE) would contribute to the continuous training of the Romanian workforce. In order to strengthen the role of PSE, it is necessary to diversify the access pathways from the PSE to higher education by reforming the baccalaureate and increasing the possibilities for recognition of PSE courses and the transfer of credits within higher education.²

Micro-certificates and lifelong learning

A micro-certificate is a form of qualification obtained following the completion of a course or module, based on a transparent assessment (EC, n.d.c). Micro-certificates can be acquired through activities that take place

in a hybrid format, on-line, or in person. These forms of certification are useful for acquiring new skills and knowledge in a shorter period of time than traditional qualifications and degrees. In the European context, micro-certificates are also seen as mechanisms for addressing societal needs, such as economic revitalisation following the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to a sustainable economy. Recent analyses in the Romanian context suggest that micro-certifications have a high potential, but they are used to an extremely limited extent, and that the National Qualifications Authority (ANC), national quality assurance agencies and the Ministry of Education can support the creation and provision of micro-certificates.³

The new education laws (i.e. the Secondary Education Law no. 198/2023 and the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023) are likely to bring clarifications and greater insight into how the state contributes to the recognition of learning outcomes in various contexts, in particular through the National Qualifications Framework (CNC) and the National Qualifications Authority (ANC). However, at the time of writing this report, the 2023-2027 National Adult Education Strategy has not yet been finalised, which does not allow a more accurate prediction regarding the evolution of lifelong learning

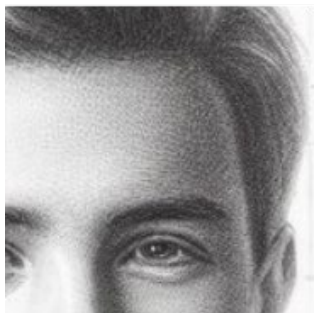
² Mihut, G. G. Badescu. 2022. *Post-Secondary Education in Romania. Rationale for decisions in higher education.* No. 1/2022.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361174350_Invatamantul_Post-secundar_in_Romania

³ Iucu, R. B., Ciolan, L., Nedelcu, A., & Cartis, A. (2021). Why micro-credits should become educational "macro-policies" for the definition of future European learning

programmes. Available at <https://unibuc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Micro-creditele-in-sistemul-universitar-din-Romania-finalcu-coperta.pdf> Mihut, G. G. Badescu. 2022. *Post-Secondary Education in Romania. Rationale for decisions in higher education.* No. 1/2022.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361174350_Invatamantul_Post-secundar_in_Romania



In conclusion, the data collected through the survey create a more optimistic context of participation in training programmes than the one suggested by the data collected at the European level. Although the employer is the entity that most often offers training programmes, the beneficiaries consider that the usefulness of these programmes is predominantly reflected in the personal plan, and only subsequently in the professional plan (and here, more from an instrumental perspective, related to increasing income or finding a new job).





Analysis

03 Analysis of interviews

Această This data analysis subsection complements the survey data analysis. As part of the data collection process, we interviewed 9 people representing employers (7 from energy, retail and HoReCa companies, one member of the academic community, and one representative of civil society). In addition, we also spoke with 9 employees or former employees in the HORECA field. The analysis is largely based on the interviews with employers, those with employees being used rather to validate and complete the information obtained from the first ones.

3.1. The offer, content and organisation form of vocational training courses

From the perspective of **the diversity of the courses offered** by the employer, a significant range of such courses can be found. The offer of vocational training programmes is influenced, first of all, by the skills targeted by the employer, basically by his needs to have a trained and productive team. At a company in the utilities sector, for example, employees have access to a very large number of training programmes, and the human resources department's strategy is to design the programme offer so that there is continuous interest.

Many companies try to offer a wide range of in-house courses or offer employees free access to online courses on various topics offered by external platforms to which companies pay subscriptions. Sometimes on-the-job training overlaps with integration programmes. Many of the interviews with employers revealed examples of how new employees are integrated into the pre-existing team, which is also the case with some employees who have been absent for a longer period (parental leave for example), or with those who change their position or the team they work with. A system is sometimes used in which one employee takes care of another employee, similar to a buddy/mentor mechanism, which helps the newcomer to the company or team to adapt to the new working context.



The mentoring/buddy system contributes not only to the integration of new employees, but it also functions as a way in which, through discussions and counselling (with the mentor/buddy), the employee more easily realises the most suitable professional development directions. We believe that training programmes that include, whenever possible, a component of integrating an employee either in a new collective or in a new structure within the same community, are beneficial for the employee, as they combine the acquisition of vocational skills with the motivation derived from the desire to integrate.

As regards **the content and the form/way of carrying out the programmes offered by the employer**, they are organised either with in-house expertise or with external experts. Of course, there are various considerations on deciding to contract expertise from the market, since these services involve higher costs and require the existence of a significant demand (the training of a minimum group of employees for which a workshop can be organised, for example, with external resource) as compared to the use of internal resources. A respondent from the HoReCa sector mentioned that many of these training courses with outsourced human resources are largely aimed at new employees (labour shortages force companies to stop looking for qualified employees, relying instead on candidates' motivation), but such courses have very high costs and some hotels, for example, prefer to invest these financial resources in other areas, such as salary increases.

According to a respondent from an energy company, outsourced courses have the advantage of giving the opportunity to know professional realities in other fields as well, and involve a certain degree of relationship with other people in these fields. The disadvantage is that these courses are often not adapted to the specific needs of a company, being built as a generic product that can be offered to several employers. In terms of how the courses are conducted, the pandemic proved that, although the online environment cannot replace face-to-face interaction, various training programmes could be organised more efficiently and, thanks to the removal of geographical restrictions, more employees could benefit from these courses. This aspect was also confirmed by another respondent in the area of energy companies. Moreover, especially after the pandemic there was a reluctance to participate in training programmes that take place exclusively online, due to the so-called online fatigue, but also depending on the type of profession (for example, for employees who work a lot with customers face-to-face, it is necessary that the training courses also contain at least an offline interaction component).

Many of the training programmes proposed by employers offer skills specific to each specialisation. However, some companies also focus on the acquisition of contiguous skills, many in the field of digitalisation, which offer employees a better and varied training in the labour market. In a retail company, for example, the training programmes themselves are thought to be very close to how social



media works, giving participants a diverse experience as a learning environment, where the digital always intertwines with the more classical learning experiences. Thus, digital skills are acquired more easily. Some employees are more interested in participating in such programmes and, depending on their specialisation, may be attracted to programmes that develop management skills. Moreover, in the retail sector, no exclusive preference is noted for courses and programmes closely related to the employees' profession, they are open to broadening their range of skills in other areas as well. A company sometimes assumes that the outcome of an upskilling may result in

the loss of an employee in whom a lot has been invested, especially if that employee cannot be offered a higher position in the company after completing certain vocational training courses

One of the ideas resulted from the conducted interviews concerns **the opportunity of overlapping or assimilating the process of acquiring and perfecting digital skills to a strategy for improving media skills (media literacy)**. Thus, the acquisition of digital skills would be an integrated part of the same learning process that creates skills related to critical thinking and media literacy.

A possible ranking of these skills would look like this (according to the respondent representing the aforementioned NGO):

- 1. the ability to use digital media in a safe and responsible way*
- 2. the ability to become part of the digital ecosystem by means of the ability to create content*
- 3. the ability to use digital technologies to solve global problems but also to create new opportunities (digital entrepreneurship).*



Employees' access to lifelong learning programmes differs from company to company. Firstly, there are – as per profession and specialisation – courses that are mandatory for maintaining a certification or acquiring a new one. For this category, an increased participation rate is recorded because employees have a legal obligation to participate in order to be able to carry out their activity. For any other type of training, companies implement various selection strategies. For example, a company in the energy sector pointed out that a minority is selected to participate in such programmes, the main criterion being the applicants' intrinsic motivation. Thus, although it targets a fairly small group in which the company invests significant resources, the results are adequate; this approach neutralizes the risk of abandonment or loss of interest during the programmes. **The offer to participate in training programmes is often made in the context of evaluating the employee's performance.** Hence the employer and the employee discuss the skills and abilities necessary for the latter's professional development, and then, through successive assessments, the employee's progress towards acquiring these skills is monitored. According to a respondent in the energy sector, the main motivation for participating in training and skilling programmes is the employee's, with the direct superior being the one to discuss and determine with the employee what skills/abilities he needs most. In addition, the company

itself is responsible for organising programmes when certain certifications are required by law, participation being mandatory.

3.2. Attitude towards learning and intrinsic motivation

Employees' participation in training programmes provided by/at the workplace can be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. In general, employers consider the attitude and intrinsic motivation of employees to be the most important factors for their participation in training programmes. However, many respondents mentioned the fact that this type of employee is in fact a minority: there are very few employees who are proactive and have a real desire to participate in these programmes. In at least two interviews in the HoReCa sector, the interviewees dealing with human resource management and employees' vocational training were, in their turn, people with a real interest in developing their vocational skills. In other words, they implement successful programmes for employees because they themselves have attended many similar programmes and understand how important both intrinsic motivation and available programme offer are. These respondents mentioned that their training experience helps them better understand the needs of employees, also acknowledging that they cannot assume



that intrinsic motivation is the rule; rather, intrinsic motivation is the exception. A respondent in the HoReCa field spoke about the fact that participating in many training programmes in various cities and countries gave him a sense of security regardless of the location he went to, as everywhere he would meet people in his field.

In addition to the satisfaction offered by participating in such training programmes, the increased sense of security and stability at work, as well as the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, which support professional development, were also emphasised. Employees also declared that their participation in these programmes generates a high level of appreciation and recognition on behalf of the employers, which contributes to increased job satisfaction. The attitude towards learning is also very important: if an employee is constantly involved in learning programmes and in the process of acquiring new skills, the feeling of security in a volatile labour market increases. Qualifications and requalifications acquired through lifelong learning programmes give the individual a certain autonomy in the labour market, a fact that increases this feeling of security.

Extrinsic motivation refers to the participation in certain upskilling or training programmes in order to be promoted to a higher position or for a salary increase. For example, one of the

companies whose employees we spoke to, in the trade sector, carries out a complex mentoring programme that runs over a period of about 10 months and involves both career counselling and technical training, as well as acquiring transversal skills, skills of the future, such as critical thinking or presentation and problem-solving skills. The time investment is significant on the part of the employee, as it also involves dedicating 3 to 10 hours per week of his spare time. However, some participants in training programmes choose to take part in such programmes from an instrumental perspective — they correlate this effort with potential promotion and financial gain in the near future.





3.3. Participation in lifelong learning programmes – triggers and inhibitors

Some of the respondents also referred to the inhibiting factors of the participation in lifelong learning programmes. In general, some employers believe that the employees' intrinsic motivation to participate in learning programmes is lacking – the high availability of information inhibits learning; as so much information is constantly available, the employee sometimes chooses not to explore it.

o According to a respondent in the energy sector, in Romania there is a problem with the definition of professional standards, and the state's support for the participation in these programmes is low. It is not enough for universities to have various postgraduate programmes, but potential applicants must be motivated to access these resources. For example, for the women returning from parental leave the participation in a training programme can be encouraged by reducing the working day from 8 to 6 hours but maintaining the full-time wage level. Another option may be to set up a tax deduction scheme, which would be related to the participation in educational programmes, thus encouraging the active participation in training and skilling courses.

Several respondents mentioned the absence of a coherent national strategy regarding training programmes and the interviews showed that **all companies rely exclusively on their own resources and knowledge when organising training programmes**. A detailed national strategy and a support on behalf of competent public institutions is often felt as an obstacle to the development of this field. Furthermore, a respondent in the HoReCa sector mentioned that, although their training programmes are constantly adapted and updated to reflect changing customer needs and expectations, the curricula on the basis of which certain subjects/skills are taught and which must be certified by public institutions through a cumbersome system, are still those of a few decades ago.

Another factor inhibiting participation is related to the fact that **certain positions have limited growth and development potential** due to the specifics of the work performed (for example, plumbers in energy companies). With these employees, the participation in the programmes is sometimes mandatory (due to the regular need for re-certification on certain aspects), but the motivation to learn new things is inhibited by the lack of need or by the limited possibilities to advance professionally.

On the other hand, some employees mentioned that the multitude of online courses during the pandemic made some of them less receptive to such opportunities, especially since some of these online courses lasted a whole day,



which was considered very tiring. Some of the employees of a commercial operator declared that they would return with more enthusiasm after **the courses were to be held in a physical format again**, which they did. At the same employer, it was found that some employees associate training programmes with their school experiences, making it more difficult for them to adapt to the idea of attending a training course. The popularity of such a programme increases once the employees no longer perceive it as an exam during the years of compulsory education.

As discussed above, the form in which a training programme takes place is important. Beyond the online/offline distinction, **the formal educational training, for example, can be an inhibitor of the participation** because this situation involves programmes targeting a specific (sometimes limited) category of employees (e.g., plant engineers or receptionists).

A separate category of factors inhibiting participation is related to **the duration of a training programme**. Several respondents in the HoReCa sector mentioned that the pandemic had a strong effect on this industry, and this effect is still visible. Although from the

point of view of customers the demand is again comparable to that before the pandemic, the HoReCa sector has become rather an unattractive field for workers. The level of income obtained by the employees of this sector contributed to this perception, as well as the fact that during the pandemic this was one of the most affected areas, many people losing their jobs. However, one respondent in the HoReCa sector declared that working in an accommodation unit is, or can be, an experience with many advantages, especially from the point of view of working in a relatively tight and close-knit community, which creates a state of well-being and security. Several respondents in the hotel sector mentioned that, in principle, employees respond positively to the offers to participate in training courses, training programmes and certifications, both mandatory and voluntary, but they increasingly emphasise the balance between work life and personal/private life.





Thus, **employees respond more enthusiastically to the invitations to participate in a course if it takes place during working hours**, and not later in the day or at the end of the week. This situation was also mentioned by the respondents in the trade sector. One respondent was asked whether there is a profile of the employee who predominantly refuses training in his spare time, going on the idea that possibly employees who have a family would predominantly fall into this category for objective reasons. Surprisingly, it seems that sometimes even the employees who have families are the ones who make time for these programmes in their spare time, because they more clearly understand their need for professional development that may lead to a promotion, which in turn may generate the ability to offer children several development options, which involve significant additional costs. Young people, especially, are less willing to allocate their spare time to professional development.

In this regard, an approach has been observed according to which training in private time is considered as a measure of the dedication and professionalism of employees, which unfortunately suggests a view that to some extent disregards his private life. In some companies (e.g. in HoReCa), people over 30 seem reluctant to attend training programmes, especially if they are online. One respondent believes that the participation in such programmes is lower after a certain age because of the educational context in Romania: the

practice of continuing professional development after a certain age is not internalised. Conversely, in a company in the energy sector, the X generation persons were observed to be more participatory and open to participating.

A respondent in the energy field explained that **all costs associated with training programmes are borne by the employer when the programmes are mandatory**, but when they are not derived from legal requirements, there is also the possibility of co-payment or of signing an addendum to the individual labour agreement, according to which the employee will stay with the company for a specific time after benefitting from a training programme.

3.4. Participation in training programmes – the perspective of potential beneficiaries

From the employees' point of view, the inhibiting and facilitating factors of the participation in multiple learning programmes are similar to those mentioned by employers, but there are also some differences. **The main reason why employees do not attend training courses is the lack of calibration with the employees' needs.** However, there is also a difficulty for employees to indicate which needs should be addressed by the training offer.



In order to form a comprehensive picture of the factors that motivate or inhibit the employees' participation in lifelong learning programmes, the present research also includes the analysis of a set of reactions of some employees or former employees in the HoReCa field. Out of a total of 9 respondents, people in the age range of 25-55 years, 5 of them graduated from high school, and 4 are graduates of higher education, either at bachelor's or master's degree level. All 9 respondents participated in vocational training or skilling programmes at some point in the past. Eight respondents mentioned that the programmes they attended lasted more than one day, and seven stated that these programmes were paid. Of the 9 respondents, 7 chose to participate because they were curious to learn something that can help them advance in their job/profession/field of activity, one as a result of an obligation from the employer, and one out of curiosity to learn something unrelated to his field of activity (hobby). With all respondents, the programmes took place in their spare time, and with 6 of them, the programme ended with a diploma or

certificate obtained at the end of the training courses/programme. The main sources of information about training programmes were, in order of popularity: internetul, the Internet, the employer, social media and friends/colleagues.

Although most of the respondents attended paid programmes, only 5 out of 9 believe that they were useful for their professional development. Many respondents said it was easy to identify the courses they were interested in, whether they were online or face-to-face. **Many of those interviewees were intrinsically motivated**, aiming to increase their level of knowledge in a certain field. However, negative aspects were also reported, with some respondents stating that it was difficult to identify courses with a schedule that would allow them to participate, and in one case there were also dissatisfactions because of the outdated support materials. One respondent mentioned that university programmes are often not linked to the actual and pragmatic needs of the labour market, which makes them less attractive.





Many respondents (employees) saw the usefulness of participating in these programmes in terms of acquiring both theoretical and practical knowledge. In addition, participation also fostered the development of professional networks, which is a plus in professional development. From the perspective of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was felt differently. Some respondents took a break from their professional activities, a phenomenon perceived by some of them in a positive light. Others continued to work after the restrictions were lifted, but they highlighted the difficulties faced due to the context, with some restaurants only able to function as terraces, and the high level of stress, which generated nervousness and a high degree by rudeness from customers, making interactions with them more difficult to manage. Furthermore, some respondents completely gave up the job they had before the pandemic, and qualified in other fields. Some respondents mentioned that during the pandemic the availability of training programmes did not help them, probably also because of the financial pressures that threatened the entire field.

In conclusion, the interviews with employers and employees modulated the information obtained through the survey on a representative sample. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation seems to be one of the important variables in explaining the

participation in lifelong learning programmes, at least in the sectors included in the research (HoReCa, retail, energy). In each field, the minority of intrinsically motivated employees is the participative one, while the extrinsically motivated majority attends training programmes only if they are mandatory, free, are organised in their spare time and in a hybrid format.

This main conclusion suggests the way in which lifelong learning should be adapted to both the needs of employers and, above all, the needs of employees.

Given that the interviews were conducted with a relatively low number of respondents mainly in a few sectors of activity (HoReCa, energy, retail), the information obtained cannot be generalised, it only characterises these fields.





Conclusions

04 Conclusions and recommendations

This report contains the analysis of a national survey for a representative sample and approximately 20 interviews with respondents in the fields of HoReCa, energy and retail, regarding the factors that inhibit or facilitate the participation in lifelong learning programmes in Romania.

4.1. Conclusions

Some main conclusions of this study are relevant from the perspective of understanding the low participation rate in vocational training programmes in Romania, and also of formulating recommendations for its increase.

1. The participation of adults under 65 in lifelong learning programmes in Romania is, according to survey data, significantly higher than that mentioned in European surveys: 38% of respondents state that they have participated in training programmes in the last 12 months, organised either at work or in their spare time. Therefore, the participation in lifelong learning programmes is not as weak in Romania as we expected. Of course, these participation rates may be affected by a number of factors such as mandatory participation in certain programmes (which are particularly common among public sector employees), the inclusion of workshops lasting less than one day as training programmes, or the inclusion of the development of skills not necessarily related to the respondent's profession (e.g. hobbies).
2. We observe that people with a higher socio-economic status participate more in lifelong learning programmes, regardless of the area they come from. People between 35 and 55 participate most often in such programmes, whether they are organised during work or leisure time, with young people being more often attracted to programmes that take place during leisure time. Moreover, these programmes last longer on average than those organised at work.



3. The perception of the usefulness of participating in training and skilling programmes focuses on three dimensions: personal (75% of respondents), for increasing income (36%), and for finding a job (26%).
4. Most of these courses are offered by the employer or an employers' organisation (almost 60%), with educational institutions accounting for 9%.
5. Although lack of time is seen as an inhibiting factor in terms of participation (over 60%), some respondents would consider participating in such programmes if they were free of charge, resulted in a degree/certificate, helped in the workplace or in finding another job.
6. From the employers' point of view, although training courses are often widely offered, employees' participation is not high because most employees are not intrinsically motivated. Often, extrinsic motivation such as increased pay or promotion means that participation is not sustained, sometimes leading to drop-out along the way.
7. Factors facilitating the participation in lifelong learning programmes include: organising courses free of charge, organising them during working hours, running training programmes that include both core and transversal (e.g. digital) skills, including dimensions of collective integration or social interaction in several training programmes, or involving employees more widely in training programmes (not just management, for example) leading to a sense of *ownership*.
8. Factors inhibiting the participation in lifelong learning programmes include: too long duration of some training courses, lack of clear definition of professional standards in Romania, mismatch between the employees' needs and the training courses offered by different entities, organisation of courses exclusively online, lack of interest and time, a passive attitude towards the learning process in general in Romania.



4.2. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of quantitative data and interviews with employers and employees, the following recommendations for increasing the participation in vocational training/skilling programmes in Romania are outlined.

R1. The development of mechanisms to recognise prior learning for recognition of completed courses. These should allow for recognition between PSE programmes, micro-certificate, bachelor's level and lifelong learning programmes. We reiterate our hope that the new 2023-2027 National Adult Learning Strategy will include specific references to these issues.

R2. The development of mechanisms whereby pupils' and students' professional experience to be assessed and valued for professional certification (procedures for the recognition of learning in non-formal contexts).

R3. The creation of a mechanism whereby the offer of vocational training and/or upskilling courses is correlated with the employees' needs. Such a mechanism could be created by the state, by providing support for those programmes which, following evaluations, have high employability rates and high levels of satisfaction on behalf of former trainees. It is also important that, through surveys, we try to better understand employees' perceptions of their own needs.

R4. We recommend that lifelong learning programmes pay more attention to vulnerable groups, as they are often the ones who have difficulty in participating in such programmes. Thus, the state should offer educational scholarships as a priority to people with a low socio-economic status, people who have been out of work for a while, or to older people.

R5. Currently, the data related to lifelong learning are fragmented, use different definitions, and do not allow for detailed analyses of the sector. In order to inform public policies, existing data need to be centralised and harmonised. Where available — both individual and aggregate data — they should be made available for analysis to researchers and other relevant actors. The collection of statistical data should include information on the educational background of adults related to formal education, PSE, microcredits and lifelong learning, as well as socio-economic profile. In addition, more detailed information is needed about the content of lifelong learning programmes as well as about their evaluation by participants.

R6. The state should take a greater role in regulating and promoting lifelong skilling/training programmes. We therefore recommend:



1. Offering scholarships. The awarding criteria should take into account the applicants belonging to vulnerable categories and the importance of the targeted programmes (area of national interest, quality indicators).
2. Providing tax incentives for companies that offer training programmes or scholarships to employees, beyond tax deductibility.
3. Promoting pro-lifelong learning attitudes through information campaigns on the personal benefits of education at all ages.

R7. Several interviews and the analysis of the survey data revealed that many employees are not willing to participate in training programmes if they require a significant sacrifice of personal time, or if they are expensive. Thus, we recommend that those training/skilling courses taking place in the workplace should be free of charge and carried out during working hours, even if this means that some courses will run over a longer period of time but with fewer hours per day.

R8. The interviews revealed the idea that training programmes are more supported and appreciated by employees if they have at least a face-to-face component. We recommend that lifelong learning programmes should be organised either face-to-face or in a hybrid format whenever possible.

R9. Corporate mentoring programmes make a notable contribution to developing intrinsic motivation for professional development. We recommend the development of such programmes.

R10. Digital skills are undoubtedly necessary for any type of employee, in the context of the accelerated transition to a digital economy. We recommend that the training/skilling programmes which develop digital skills should be targeted to a greater extent at those outside management structures.



Appendix 1. Questionnaire – survey

RECRUITMENT DEMOGRAPHICS Section (it is addressed at the beginning of the questionnaire, before all sections)

Gender

Age (we collect age by years, so we can make any interval from age 18 onwards)

Urban-rural residence environment

Size of locality (Bucharest, cities with more than 200K inhabitants, cities with 50K-200K inhabitants, towns with under 50K inhabitants, rural)

Region (the 8 development ones)

Occupational status:

- State employee (with/without managerial position, with 0-5 or 6+ subordinates)
- Private employee (with/without managerial position, with 0-5 or 6+ subordinates)
- On their own (it includes employers + self-employed professionals)
- Pensioner
- Pupil or student
- Housewife
- Unemployed, between jobs
- Not working for other reasons

Filter: For employees:

What field do you work in?

- a. Constructions
- b. Industry
- c. Agriculture
- d. IT and communications
- e. Hotels and restaurants
- f. Transport
- g. Trade
- h. Health
- i. Education
- j. Public administration
- k. Other field



Education:

- 10 grades or less
- High school
- Post high school
- Faculty
- Master's degree
- Doctorate's degree

Civil status

- Married
- Divorced
- Widow/widower
- Not married

VOCATIONAL TRAINING COURSES Section

IT APPLIES TO EVERYONE EXCEPT PENSIONERS, PUPILS, STUDENTS

In the following we will talk about courses or vocational training activities carried out with a trainer or a teacher.

Q1. In the last 12 months, have you participated in vocational training courses organised at your workplace, during the working hours?

1. *Yes*

2. *No*

Q2. In the last 12 months, have you participated in vocational training courses organised in your spare time?

1. *Yes*

2. *No*

Filter: Those who answered YES at Q1 or Q2

If you have attended more than one such courses in the last 12 months, please answer about the most recent one.



A1. How long was the course?

Read the choices. Single answer. If necessary, remind respondents that we are only interested in the MOST RECENT COURSE in the last 12 months.

1. One day or less
2. Several days
3. Between one week and one month
4. Longer than one month
5. *He/She does not know/cannot answer (do not read)*

A2. Was the course free?

1. Yes
2. No

A3. Did what you learned in this course help you in any of the situations below?

Read the choices, insist with yes/no at each choice

1. Finding a job	Yes	No	<i>He/She does not know / does not answer (DO NOT READ)</i>
2. Increase in salary or income	Yes	No	<i>He/She does not know / does not answer (DO NOT READ)</i>
3. Personally	Yes	No	<i>He/She does not know / does not answer (DO NOT READ)</i>

A4. Who organised the last course you attended?

Read the choices, wait for an answer after each of them. Single answer

1. An educational institution
2. The employer or an employers' organisation
3. Other organisation
4. *He/She does not know/cannot answer (do not read)*



Filter: Those who answered NO at Q1 and NO at Q2.

B1. What are the reasons why you have NOT attended vocational training courses in the last 12 months?

Read the choices, wait for an answer after each of them. Multiple answer

1. You didn't feel the need
2. Poor offer of courses
3. Lack of time
4. Cost of courses
5. Other reason
6. *He/She does not know/cannot answer
(do not read)*

B2. Some courses are offered free of charge by various institutions, others are for a fee. Would you want to attend a vocational training course if you had to pay?

1. Yes
2. No
3. *He/She does not know/cannot answer
(do not read)*

B3. Which of the following would convince you to attend a vocational training course in the next 12 months?

Read the choices, wait for an answer after each of them. Multiple answer

Randomisation of answer choices

1. To be free of charge
2. To be carried out during working hours
3. To offer a diploma or a certificate
4. To help you perform better at your current job or get promoted at your current job
5. To help you find a new, better paid job
6. *He/She does not know/cannot answer (do not read)*



SENSITIVE DEMOGRAPHIC Section (it is addressed at the end of the questionnaire, after all sections)

Number of persons in household

Net monthly income per household:

- Up to 2000 RON
- Between 2001 and 3000 RON
- Between 3001 and 4000 RON
- Between 4001 and 5000 RON
- Between 5001 and 7000 RON
- Between 7001 and 7900 RON
- Over 9000 RON

Net monthly income per person

- Up to 2000 RON
- Between 2001 and 3000 RON
- Between 3001 and 4000 RON
- Between 4001 and 5000 RON
- Between 5001 and 7000 RON
- Over 7000 RON



Appendix 2. Interview guide - employers

1. What is your position in this job, and how long have you held it?
2. What is your experience with lifelong learning programmes? (both as a participant/former participant and as a representative of the employer in charge of identifying such programmes for employees and facilitating their access to them)
3. Which areas do you think have been made vulnerable by the Covid-19 pandemic (and, therefore, where it is most important to put the emphasis in lifelong learning programmes)?
4. In your opinion, what do you think are the main barriers that prevent employees from participating in lifelong learning programmes in general in Romania? And in particular here, at your workplace?
5. In your opinion, what do you consider to be the main factors that facilitate employees' participation in lifelong learning? And especially here, at your workplace?
6. Referring only to your workplace, what do you think are the most important skills that could be acquired by employees through lifelong learning programmes? Which would be most needed?
7. At your workplace, do you consider that there are certain categories of employees who would particularly benefit from involvement in lifelong learning programmes (employees in potentially vulnerable positions)? If so, which ones and why?
8. If you are / have been in charge of identifying / facilitating lifelong learning programmes for the employees you work with, how did you identify those programmes? Who have you cooperated with?